



Top Hits: The focal point of the renovation of Van Houten Dining Hall at Edinboro University emphasizes action and interaction.

A Dining Transformation

Edinboro University Revamps Foodservices & Food Retail with Flair

by

Lynn Browning

Edinboro, Pennsylvania, located twenty miles south of Erie, is the home of Edinboro University, a member of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. The 585-acre campus includes a five-acre lake and eight on-campus residence halls. With 7,700 undergraduate and graduate students, Edinboro offers 100 degree programs.

Just two years ago, Wood Dining Services and Edinboro University teamed up to upgrade services across campus. The first target was the University Center. This location already had a Jazzman's® Cafe, Wood Dining Services first signature retail brand upscale coffee concept. As part of the new five-year agreement a Sky Ranch Grill™ would be added. Van Houten Dining Hall, the "traditional" board operation would also be slated for renovation along with the Rose Hall Food Court. The final step is the addition of a Jazzman's® Café in the Baron-Forness Library.

In the University Center, Sky Ranch Grill™ replaced a single pan pizza concept. Sales grew by 25 percent in the first month. The Sky Ranch Grill menu is simple, from fresh – never frozen – burgers, chicken and porta-

Salads: This station is designed to give guests food that's fresh and ready at their convenience.



bello mushroom sandwiches to local favorites like grilled cheese to chicken club sandwiches.

As the work was beginning on the University Center, Connor Architecture began to design the new Marketplace for Van Houten Dining Hall. Wood Dining Services, Mark Connor and Edinboro University all shared the same vision:

Open up the vast space and eliminate the old serving lines to give our guests more interaction with our staff. Mark Connor explains, "The Marketplace design exposes the traditionally mysterious and hidden production of campus board plans by bringing freshly cooked food and ingredients into the public realm. This new kind of dining experience juxtaposes the abstract visual excitement of an urban bistro with the intimacy and community of a farmers market."

The goal was to make the board operation more retail. Van Houten houses three dining rooms, a convenience store, the access office and dining services office. Our South Dining Room is used mostly for catering, the North Dining Room is The University Club, our Faculty and Staff Dining Room and the Main Dining totaling 7920 square feet is where the transformation would

take place. Due to the volume of conferences and camps, the renovation would have to happen in between the first and second semesters instead of over an entire summer. The decision was made to close the Main Dining Room during the last week of classes so that work could begin. Our meals were served out of our smaller catering dining room.

We knew that we needed to let our guests know what was happening. We began a public relations campaign with renderings and blueprints throughout Van Houten. Specials were run at the University Center and Rose Hall to accommodate the increased number of diners. Students were getting excited. We updated our website daily with pictures of our work in progress.

Edinboro's maintenance crew worked hard demolishing the beverage counters, salad bar and dessert bar that were in the dining room. Then they moved on to

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tearing out a block wall which divided the two serving lines and opening up the area which entered the dining room. Things were happening fast. As soon as the electricians unhooked a piece of equipment, it was removed so that floor and wall repair could begin. The painters were trying to prime and paint around it all. As the walls went from off-white to bright green, purple and yellow, the excitement amongst the staff grew. Atlantic Equipment arrived with all of the new counter-tops, sneeze guards and equipment. They worked a later shift so that the university's crew could have the space during the day.

The new design gives guests and associates the opportunity to interact as food preparation is happening.



When students returned to the University on January 15, 2001, they were amazed. Comments like "wow, what happened?" and "this is incredible" were heard

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all over campus. Many members of the campus community visited to see what all of the talk was about. The center of the dining room is now the focal point with an incredible action station that alternates between Pacific Rim and Southwest.

Connor describes the design further, "Our approach to the marketplace was to create a dynamic and interactive space. The materials, forms, texture and color have been thoughtfully fused in order to enhance and

Guests get to see that "it's all about the food"

encourage its strong sense of place and community. Arching maple canopies, festival lights, glazed ceramic tiles and butcher block all reflect the historical elements that make up a marketplace."

Our guests choose their fresh veggies for their stir-fry and then hand it to the cook who stir-fry's it and adds authentic sauces. Around the station, you can also find the salad bar and some seating. Our guests love to be part of the action, and this area soon became the best seat in the house. Hometown moved into the dining room and became self-serve. The menu also changed to give guests the items they most requested on a more frequent basis. During lunch and dinner, they can always get *real* mashed potatoes and homemade macaroni and cheese. We also serve favorites like turkey and stuffing once a week. Pasta now has its own station, giving our guests the opportunity to enjoy traditional pasta dishes, roasted veggies and homemade breadsticks. Sandwiches, a self-serve deli area, also receives great comments from our guests. They choose from a large assortment of breads and rolls, pile on the favorites like ham, turkey and salami, add cheese from an assortment of swiss, cheddar, provolone, mozzarella and American, and then they can press it in a panini grill.

Pizza was also a new addition to this incredible operation. Our fresh-dough pizza is hand tossed throughout the entire service time. Cheese and pepperoni pizzas are always available, and each day we run a specialty pizza such as buffalo wing or cheeseburger. Recently,

our pizza cook began to make cheeseless pizza for our vegan guests. They absolutely love it. Often they will bring him their preferred veggies and tofu from Pacific Rim, and they are happy to wait while their pizza is custom made.

The only station that remained in the same area was The Grill. However, location was the only thing that was the same. A chargrill was added along with a speed rack and a topping station. Guests now choose from hamburgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, turkey burgers, veggie burgers and hot dogs that are wrapped and ready to go. The cook is stationed next to the speed rack, allowing for some great interaction and frequent special orders.

The first week of each semester is always exciting, but the new Marketplace opening made it extra special. The design of this large dining room gives us more opportunity to feature specials than we ever thought possible. Our guests love the vibrant colors and the open spaces. The best part of the renovation is that it has given our staff the opportunity to display their incredible talents and our guests the opportunity to see what happens behind the scenes.

We're Not Done Yet

The new look of dining at Edinboro continued this summer. The Rose Hall Food Court remodeling project is now complete and students returned to an exciting new collection of signature retail brands, including Pete's Arena™ and Subversions™. Pete's Arena features pizza slices, whole pies, calzones, stromboli, pasta, sandwiches, salads and dessert. Subversions features mainstream subs with soup, salad and dessert components. A new Jazzman's® cafe also opened in the Baron-Forness Library, giving students the opportunity to continue to enjoy an upscale coffee house concept featuring Seattle's Best coffee, fresh-baked goods including scones, muffins, turnovers, biscotti and cookies while they study. ♦

Key Participants

Edinboro University

James Sheehan
Vice President for Finance & Administration

Paul Kightlinger
Director of Auxiliary Services

Linda Geissler
Director of Dining Services

Wood Dining Services

John Iacunato
Vice President Campus Services

Damon Leiver
Vice President Retail Brands Group

George Cashmark
District Manager

Lynn Browning
General Manager

Connor Architecture

Mark Connor
Principal Architect

Robert Weir
Associate

Sierra Meister
Designer

Atlantic Equipment Specialists

General Construction & Equipment Contractor
Mark LaMotte
Bob Potzer



Lynn Browning is a 12-year veteran of the hospitality industry. She has been the general manager for dining services at Edinboro University since 2000. She is recognized among her peers as an innovator whose creative ideas and operational expertise serve as a benchmark for management performance.